



A Great Education for *All Students* Depends on Great Leadership

A School Board's Obligation to Support Improved Student Outcomes

The Role of a School Board in Promoting Student Achievement

Supporting student learning and academic outcomes is arguably the most important responsibility of a school board. According to the [National School Boards Association](#) (NSBA), the fundamental role of school boards is “to work with their communities to improve student achievement in their local public schools.” Although the realization of academic improvement is a collaborative effort that involves teachers, principals, parents, and the students themselves, the school board must ensure the conditions necessary for success, including adequate resources, quality leadership, a coherent vision, and accountability for results.

[Research](#) has confirmed a positive correlation between improved student outcomes and a strong school board that is capable of advocating for students and developing a pathway to achieve set goals: “Put simply: The board supports improved student outcomes by creating and sustaining the conditions that support excellent—and equitable—teaching and learning.”

MNPS Trends in Student Outcomes

Despite [year-over-year funding increases](#), Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) achievement levels have demonstrated little progress over the last decade – and, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced schools to close earlier this year, Tennessee education leaders, including [Education Commissioner Penny Schwinn](#), anticipate [dramatic learning losses](#) that will worsen existing achievement gaps among Tennessee students.

In [2017-2018 school year](#), 21 Nashville public schools ranked among the lowest 5% of all schools in the state in measures of academic achievement– up from [15 schools](#) in 2014. [Assessment data](#) from the 2018-19 school year shows [fewer than 30%](#) of MNPS students in grades 3-8 are proficient or better in math, and [only a](#) quarter are proficient in English language arts. The district’s high school graduation rate declined slightly to 80.2%, below the [national average](#) of 85%, and only [three out of every ten](#) MNPS high school graduates are prepared for college.

Best Practices in Raising Achievement Levels

[Experts suggest](#) highly-effective school boards employ several strategies to support academic improvement, including:

- **Establishing a vision and goals and aligning resources accordingly.** According to [NSBA](#), “Boards in high-achieving districts are more likely to engage in goal setting and monitoring their progress.” The goals should encompass several objectives, including closing equity and opportunity gaps.

- **Using data to inform continuous improvement.** School boards should leverage data to regularly evaluate progress and identify opportunities to course correct. Data should also be used to support equity by better understanding student needs and developing strategies to close achievement gaps.
- **Creating a culture of support.** School boards play an important role in fostering trust and collaboration within the district. The [California School Boards Association](#) (CSBA) highlights the importance of modeling values for professional behavior, building teams united around achievement goals, encouraging professional learning opportunities, engaging with the community, and upholding transparency.
- **Prioritizing accountability.** School boards should prioritize accountability over operations and invest more time in developing strategies to raise achievement. Multiple studies confirm school boards in high-performing districts focus more time and attention on student achievement over administrative matters.
- **Investing in human capital.** School boards must ensure the district has the resources necessary to recruit and retain staff capable of developing high-quality educational programs that generate positive results for students. This includes investing in professional development that aligns with district goals and curriculum.
- **Maintaining stable and effective leadership.** [Research confirms](#) high-achieving school districts have low rates of turnover for superintendents and school board members. This trend is likely due to the fact that consistent leadership provides the continuity necessary to establish goals and to develop and adhere to a plan to reach set objectives.

Our Students and Families Deserve Strong Leadership

Now more than ever, our community depends on strong school board leadership to ensure our schools can provide improved educational opportunities for all of Nashville’s students to succeed – especially during these extraordinarily challenging times. **This week, NashvilleNOW is joining with several education advocacy and community organizations to host a virtual forum on July 15 at 7:00pm CT to help voters learn more about the priorities of current and prospective school board members in advance of the August 6 election.** [Register to attend the forum here.](#)

To better understand the fundamental roles and responsibilities of a school board, we encourage you to take a moment to learn about the challenges facing the MNPS Board and opportunities to build board strength by reviewing past documents from this series of issue briefs. See [previous white papers](#) on:

- [“Assessing the Roles and Responsibilities of the MNPS School Board”](#)
- [“The Importance of Hiring and Managing an Effective Director of Schools”](#)
- [“Examining a School Board’s Fundamental Fiscal Responsibilities”](#)